

EXPANDED ABSTRACT

The sustainability of social change. Positive factors in the consolidation of enterprises recuperated by their workers in Argentina

Recuperated enterprises are private companies that are recovered by their workers due to bankruptcy or different types of business crisis. In Argentina, at the beginning of the 21st century, within the framework of an unprecedented widespread crisis, groups of workers confronted the crisis in the companies they worked by resorting to collective action, their emblematic action being the occupation of productive facilities. Such resistance resulted in the advance over the control of production units and the associated management by the employees organized in worker cooperatives. Far from being only an exception or abnormality of the crisis, these processes of reconversion of capitalist companies based on commodity production by associated workers continued developing in the subsequent years. Although they are mostly based on associative work and on the joint ownership of the means of production, recuperated enterprises show variations in terms of their cooperative models, work conditions, and/or sustainability of their production.

In this regard, we pose the following questions: Which are the cases that have achieved the best results as experiences of associative and self-managed work? What factors have collaborated towards their consolidation? This article analyzes the positive factors for the consolidation of these experiences as cooperative companies. The originality of the research lies mainly in two aspects. Firstly, the analysis proposes a comprehensive approach to the subject, that allows knowing the modes in which the set of factors, some of them positively assessed by the existing literature, are developed and combined in the consolidated recuperated enterprises. Secondly, in methodological terms, the original approach provides a systematic analysis of these factors through the comparison of cases at the national level in a field dominated by singular case studies or statistical approaches to the phenomenon.

The theoretical perspective of the article is plural, with an axis of sociological approach to the object of study, seeking to analyze the social, political, and economic conditions favoring the consolidation of change processes in the sphere of production. It is also fed on a dialogue with diverse contributions from the fields of social and solidarity economy, economic sociology, and social change, as well as work anthropology.

The methodology strategy of this work is based on the individual and comparative analysis of 10 recuperated enterprises cases that have reached the cooperative consolidation. We understand cooperative consolidation both in its labor-economic dimension as well as in the associative dimension. We refer to the experiences that have reached productive continuity in time, and that have maintained and created jobs with adequate work conditions, in the framework of the practice of associative and

self-managed work. Following the suggestions of the methodology literature on this aspect, we sought a thematic and conceptual representation in the selected cases, depicting aspects, attributes, and themes that we consider crucial to the analysis of the consolidation of production units. In this regard, the selection was executed considering a theoretical criterion of maximization of differences in reference to the following variables in enterprises: Sector, region, size measured in number of workers, and period of recuperation. Within the case studies, we incorporated 2 in which the workers' struggle to resist the enterprise's crisis turned into a new enterprise in the same sector. These experiences differ from the rest of the sample in the fact that they do not inherit the productive means or the brand of the failed enterprise. In this sense, while these 2 cases only recuperate the labor group of the original enterprise, we call them "partially recuperated enterprises". Moreover, we selected 4 recuperated enterprises that do not reach consolidation in terms of the proposed conditions to be deemed as control cases. Field work was executed between September 2017 and October 2018. The cases were addressed by means of observations and semi-structured interviews. Additionally, we resorted to documents and articles published in communication graphic media.

Data analysis was carried out as from two channels. On the one hand, we elaborated reports per case with a narrative style that described experiences and systematized the identified positive factors. On the other hand, we created a matrix to compare the social-productive characteristics and the factors identified in each company. This allowed us to establish the general recurrence of the factors, their combination patterns, and their links with the characteristics of the companies.

As regards to the factors that paved the way for these cooperatives to reach cooperative consolidation, the analysis substantiates a number of hypotheses. Firstly, it highlights the availability of resources inherited from the failed company; these are vital as they are the starting point. Secondly, the support and the forged alliances boost the cooperative to overcome the obstacles and to outline both the associative as well as the business project. Good positioning of the products in the market is a defining element in the consolidation of the company. It partners with other exchange principles; particularly with the relations of redistribution by the State. Achieving the rightful ownership of the production unit bestows companies with greater consolidation. Political hegemony within the core of the cooperative is a key factor that provides the direction towards development. In this direction, it is a defining factor that the rightfully leading cooperative project empowers the economic management with production planning, integration and training of the working community, and investment strategies. Lastly, certain environment conditions of the area or industry that the company is in may benefit the development of the cooperative. These general premises must be modified for the cases of partially recuperated enterprises, conceptualized for the first time in this study. In these, the inheritance factor is not so significant, being decisive to achieve the concession of services through negotiation with the State.

The number of hypotheses resulting from this study deserves to be delved into and systematized in future research. None of the recuperated enterprises presented the same intertwining of the above-mentioned aspects; each case seemed to represent a social craftwork that paves its own and unique

path towards sustainability. Though it is true that certain factors impact more directly on the economic success rather than in the associative success, and vice versa, positive effects tend to show in a combined way and on the whole. Both aspects of the life of cooperatives can only be differentiated analytically; in real life they are intertwined and there is no such thing as independent impacts. Precisely, the peculiarity of the consolidated and assessed cases is the awareness of this duality.

KEYWORDS: Cooperative, Recuperated enterprise, Argentina, sustainability.